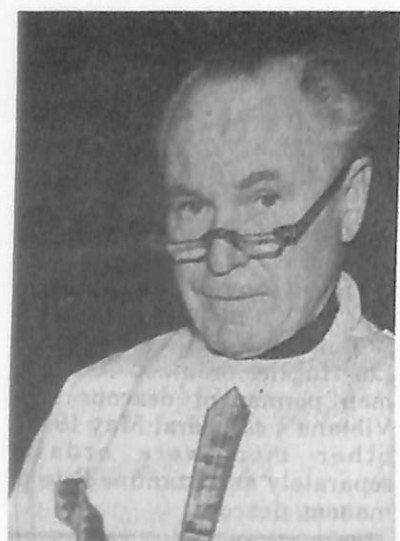




Father Edward Connelly

Father Simoni's homilies, often liberally spiced with African adventures, were never dull. His heavy Italian accent may have taxed his audience, but the content was well worth the levy.

After a long life in the service of God and man, Father Simoni retired at age 77 to return to his native town of Primiero. But, enroute, at JFK International Airport, he suffered a heart attack and died. He is buried at Monroe, Michigan.

In 1974, Father Henry Imbus retired, at age 75, as pastor of Nativity Church. The site of his retirement, a 100 acre farm near Goshen, provided plenty of opportunities for his favorite avocations of gardening and bird watching. But his primary vocation was not easily abandoned. Soon he was "helping out" at nearby parishes, St. Philomena among them.

Father Imbus had a particular affinity for St. Philomena. Always an avid outdoorsman, he liked the remote and rural setting. And, himself an unabashed traditionalist, he found the Stonelick congregation kindred spirits. He had been a teacher at Elder High School, a U.S. Army Chaplain, and pastor of eight different parishes. The wisdom gained in a lifetime of service was reflected in his sermons, most of which began with some parable based upon common rural experience.

Father Imbus became almost the unofficial "co-pastor" of St. Philomena Church, well loved by the parishioners. After celebrating his Golden Anniversary in May of 1982, he died suddenly in November of that year, at age 83.

Father Jesse Lonsway succeeded Father Connelly in 1981. A large, exuberant man, Father Lonsway did everything with great gusto, and his tenure, though short, is well-remembered.

"Father Jess" loved sacred music and loved to sing. This, too, he did with great energy and enthusiasm. He was a strong advocate of the idea that every parish, no matter how small, should have a choir....no matter how small. He encouraged the tiny choir at St. Philomena to undertake more difficult music, despite the fact that no one in the parish had any real training in vocal music. Musical quality, he insisted, was secondary. It was participation that was important. Just how attention-getting the robust singing of Father Lonsway really was is illustrated by this episode: Three year old Greg Sandfoss went about the house frequently intoning the English version of the Sanctus....almost. His mother, stopping to listen carefully, heard: "Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of Power and Might. Heaven and earth are filled with your glory. Lasagna in the highest!"

Before the year was out, Father Lonsway was replaced by Father Lawrence Strittmatter. Eleven years the Principal of Elder High School, "Father Stritty" was urbane and cosmopolitan. He had studied Philosophy and Classical Languages. He had been a Fulbright scholar in classical antiquities and archeology, studying in Rome. He was a Lt. Commander in the U.S. Naval Reserve. He served on the Board of Cincinnati's famed May Festival. He enjoyed sailing.

Veteran Missioner Taken by Death

Mass of Christian burial for Father Innocent Simoni, Verona Father missioner in Africa and Latin teacher at Sacred Heart seminary, Forestville, was celebrated July 7 at the Verona Fathers seminary in Monroe, Mich.

He died July 5 in New York after suffering a heart attack at Kennedy International airport. He was on his way to Italy, where he planned to spend his retirement. Father Simoni was 77.

A native of Primiero, Italy, Father Simoni was a distant cousin of Archbishop Joseph L. Bernardin.

Father Simoni was ordained in 1922 and spent 30 years in the Sudan. The master of several Sudanese dialects and some Arabic, in addition to Italian, English, French and Latin, he wrote several Sudanese grammars. His mission was in jungle territory, and a mauling by an angry leopard in 1936 left him with a permanent limp.

In 1953 he left the Sudan, and after several temporary assignments in the U.S., came to Sacred Heart seminary in 1964. He taught Latin and served as



Father Simoni

spiritual advisor until his retirement.

Father Simoni enjoyed painting, and produced murals both for his African chapels and the Sacred Heart seminary chapel. He also made many hand-decorated Christmas and Easter cards.

Burial was in the Verona Fathers cemetery, Monroe, Mich.

Colorful Father Simoni shared many of his adventures with the congregation at St. Philomena, as a visiting priest.

Assignment to a remote, rural parish was greeted by "Father Stritty" with some misgivings. "I have mixed emotions," he said. "I realize I have to make the change, but I am sure my heart will always be with Elder."

Father Strittmatter, and the people of "St. Phil's," soon found their similarities far greater than their differences. "Stritty" was not a stiff, aloof scholar; nor were the parishioners ignorant bumpkins. Bonds of affection formed quickly. The parish was sad to hear of his reassignment in 1982.

Every cloud has a silver lining. Father Joseph Andres succeeded Father Strittmatter, and serves the parish today. "Father Joe" was an instant success. He had rural parish experience, and was of sound, solid Cincinnati background. Having served at parishes in Fayetteville, Vera Cruz, and Mt. Orab, and three more before coming to Holy Trinity/St. Philomena, he was well prepared for the task.

In 1988, Father Andres celebrated 40 years in the priesthood. In 1987, he had been appointed Deanery representative of the Archbishop, serving more than five counties. His duties include ministry at Clermont Mercy Hospital, two nursing homes and the Clermont County Jail.

These wide-ranging duties constitute an awesome burden. But the dedication of the latest "priest of the valley" is such that he often neglects his own health and welfare in the service of God and his fellowman. For all this, he is a modest, caring man. Of his 40 years service he says only, "Maybe I have contributed what I could have."

In 1987, Father Lonsway's encouragement bore fruit. The tiny choir of St. Philomena Church participated in the Catholic Choir Festival, at St. Peter in Chains Cathedral. It was the smallest unit to do so. Hundreds of hours of hard work paid off. Historic "St. Phil's" was honorably represented by Mildred Lehnert, Anne Kuntz, Cathy Burroughs, Joan Neff and Mary Beth Sandfoss, the Direc-